

Quiet on The Set! Slate Up!

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Vermont Avenue Apartments and the day's first exterior shot, grumbling about the biting wind. Though many of the workmen come from Montreal, they seem unused to such cold weather.

Most of the technicians will go back to Montreal for the interiors, which can be faked anywhere, because tax laws require a certain percentage of the crew to be Canadian and a certain number of scenes to be shot in Canada. (Each location will have its own crew; Americans can seldom obtain work permits for Canadian films.) But Malle will shoot the exteriors here for authenticity's sake.

8 a.m.: The first shot is ready. A mob boss named Felix (played by Moses Znaimer, who owns a television station in Toronto and is making his film debut) will tease four children sitting on the trunk of his car by raising and lowering the aerial from inside. He'll drive away when his subordinate, Vinnie (Canadian actor Angus McInnes), strides into the scene.

The actors rehearse a dozen times to eliminate minute imperfections. The street urchins don their caps for one run-through and doff them for the next; Vinnie paces down the Boardwalk to the apartments with sunglasses and without them; Felix's car slips in and out of its parking space like a mechanical toy on a track.

Malle works well with his adolescent extras, bantering as easily with them as with Lancaster. He's at home with all people and all places; climatic conditions don't seem to affect him, nor do hours spent on one shot. (He scoffs when an aide dubs him "King of the Retakes.")

When Malle finishes shooting, he and his editor will trim about seven hours of footage to two. "He'll use one foot for every ten he shoots," guesses Michael Hendricks, a visiting Canadian filmmaker. "For a feature, that isn't wasteful at all."

No one works harder on the set than Malle, who built an international reputation on "Murmur of The Heart" and "Lacombe, Lucien" and released his first American film, "Pretty Baby," in 1977. He sets up each shot with photographer Richard Ciupka, positions scenery, discusses lighting, works over the script with author John Guare. He's bilingual (at least), multi-dimensional and omnipresent.

Malle looks like a distinguished Woody Allen — slight of build, bespectacled and quick-moving — and he shares Allen's wardrobe: a colorless sweater, faded black pants and blue Adidas. But he smiles more easily, and he has little of Allen's nervousness. Only once, on a fifth take after innumerable rehearsals, does he become animated with annoyance.

9:30 a.m.: The sky darkens. So do the technicians' faces. Always at the mercy of the weather, they



Burt Lancaster and Louis Malle debate interpretation of a scene at the Atlantic City Bus Terminal.

suffer delays with a stolid dismay.

Ciupka stands by the camera, looking to his light meter for hope. Six men assist him during filming. One assistant photographer pulls focus, while another operates a zoom lens; a gaffer takes charge of the lighting; two grips pull the camera and the dolly on which it rests, a flat truck about three feet wide and eight feet long; and one man pulls cord free of the dolly's

path, wearing the excess length around his neck like a yoke.

Two sound technicians, meanwhile, monitor the level of the sound recording and hold a boom mike over the set.

Over this hubbub presides first assistant director John Board, a bluff, good-natured man with a red beard and a long temper. In addition to being a diplomat, a policeman, an organizer, a soother

of his feelings and a corrector of grip, he repeats this litany: "Quiet on the set! Slate up! Turn over sound! Action!" His also is the privilege of shouting "Cut!"

At least two dozen other people, not counting gawkers, may be found milling about the set at any moment. They include make-up and wardrobe artists, prop men, a still photographer, stand-ins,

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